DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 192 897 PS 011 721

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TITLE The First Avenue After-School Day Care Center: A Program for Low Income Families in New York City.
PUB DATE Jun 79
NOTE 4p.; Paper presented at School's Out! A Conference on Day Care for the School-Age Child (Boston, MA, June 15-16, 1979). For other papers from this conference, see PS 011 714-726.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *After School Day Care; Bilingual Students; Elementary Secondary Education; *Immigrants; *Low Income Groups; Program Descriptions; Tutorial Programs

ABSTRACT

This paper provides a very brief overview of an after-school day care center in New York City which cares for a maximum of 65 immigrant children 6 through 12 years of age. The population served consists of families from Hong Kong, China, Latin America, India, Pakistan, Puerto Rico, Korea and Nigeria. As most families served know little English, multilingual staff members work closely with bilingual children. In addition to snacks and many activities, the center provides homework assistance during the school year through daily tutorial periods. The center also assists parents in their contacts with teachers and school bureaucracies. (Author/RH)

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The First Avenue After-School Day Care Center: A Program for Low Income Families in New York City

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The Chinatown Planning Council in New York City sponsors seven after-school day care centers which care for children, ages six through twelve, after school and full-time during school vacations. The centers differ from one another in their ethnic makeup and program operation. Six of the centers, which are strategically placed around Chinatown, draw children exclusively from the Chinese population. The First Avenue After-School Day Care Center, however, is located on the Lower East Side of New York in a neighborhood that has become a typical "melting pot."

The majority of our families are immigrants from places such as Hong Kong, China, Latin America, India, Pakistan, Puerto Rico, Korea and Nigeria. They live in crowded ghetto apartments. Two wage earners are essential to the economic survival of the families, but single parents working to make a living are not unusual.

Multilingual Teachers

In most cases the parents in the families we serve do not know much English. At the First Avenue ASDCC we have a multilingual staff, all of whom are college graduates with degrees in education and specialties (including art, English and elementary education) that benefit the children. In our center the predominant foreign languages are Chinese and Spanish.

Most of the immigrant children are bilingual in varying degrees. The staff can communicate in these languages, and whenever difficulties occur, the bilingual children can come to the rescue and act as translators for their peers.

At regularly scheduled parents' meetings, a miniature United Nations exists. The meeting is conducted in English, but it is translated by the staff into Spanish and Chinese.

Homework Assistance

Helping children with their homework is a major problem for the families we serve. Most parents are unable to help their children because of their language difficulties and a lack of specific subject knowledge. Also, cooking and other household duties take up much of the parents' time after work. Quite often there is no time left to help children with their homework.

In addition, we have found that public school teachers often fail to explain fully to the children how to do their homework. Frequently, the children feel intimidated and are afraid to ask for help, even when they do not understand the instructions.

Tutorial Period. For these reasons, during the school year we devote an hour a day to homework tutorial help. By establishing a structure and a positive, helpful attitude towards doing homework, we are helping children develop good work habits. As soon as the children arrive at the center, they take out their books and do their homework. A survey this year indicated that over 95% of the children in our center prefer doing homework before going to other activities. Children know they will have more time to do other things if the homework is done first.

Because we are a small center with a capacity enrollment of 65, we have divided the children into three groups with a teacher and assistant in each group. This forms a ratio of about one staff member to ten children. On occasion, our staff have tutored individuals and small groups on a particular subject matter while the rest of the children continue to do their individual homework.

The children are seated according to their age and grade level so that when the teacher goes around the room to check homework it is manageable and less frantic. When the children are clustered it also creates an opportunity for them to consult and help each other.

Public School Facilities. It is easy for us to confer with the school teachers because we utilize the public school's facilities for our day care center. We have a very good rapport with the administrators and staff of the school and information that is mutually beneficial is easily obtained.

Family Support. We feel that helping children with their homework may reduce tension at home between parents and children; may lessen the chance of teachers' requesting parents to take a valuable day off from work for conferences; may lessen confrontations between teachers and children; and, possibly, may encourage a more harmonious family life.

Children gain self-confidence when they know that their work is done. They feel more secure and comfortable in facing their teachers and peers the next day. There is more leisure time in the evening if their work is done before going home. Once a child returns home from day care there are three or four hours at the most before it is bed time. We believe it is important for families to use this time for family-oriented activities that strengthen the family unit.

Other Activities

An hour and a half is allotted to snack and homework at the after-school center. The remainder of the day (during the school year) is used for other activities. The teachers may teach a skill or help develop talents. On two days a week during the school year we play down the homework help. Workshops in various skills and activities are provided for the children to select and to enjoy. These workshops are on a rotating basis so that the children can have a variety of experiences during

those two days. The staff at First Avenue are versatile and have many skills. They work with the children in activities such as cooking, knitting, needlepoint, crocheting, and painting. In the summer, they plan swimming and trips away from the center. We go by subway or, on rare occasions, we charter a bus to take us outside the city limits.

In conclusion, we believe that a variety of factors must be taken into consideration when planning an after-school program. Some of these factors include the backgrounds, living conditions and particular needs of the families we serve. These are the factors we have kept in mind in trying to develop a high quality, responsive program for school-age children.